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[1] Introduction

161 According to the census referred to hereafter, the Bambara number more than 500,000, thus forming one of the largest population groups in West Africa.

184 This group is not homogeneous; however, in addition to its language, which is in fact its characteristic element, it does have certain basic customs common - at least in a general way - to all its members. It is possible to observe this common heritage by [121] studying one section of the group, and such is the purpose of this work.

121 The Bambara of Ségou and Kaarta, who concern us here, 127 have the distinction over their congeners of having evolved well-known empires. To the history of these empires, already known through the research of my predecessors, I shall add new documentation, based primarily on an unpublished chronicle of the empire of Ségou. This chronicle is interesting, among other reasons, because it is entirely the work of one of the traditionists whose erudition, as reliable and exact as possible within the limitations of native competence, merits our serious attention. Indeed, my book is simply a detailed commentary on this chronicle, buttressed by knowledge acquired on the spot during the course of my administrative duties and by information obtained from the works listed in the bibliography.

121 It should be noted that, though these documents and this store of knowledge make it easy enough to describe the customs if one limits oneself to generalities, it is on the other hand a difficult and delicate task to define the customs as they are applied to given social manifestations and to try to deduce the principles underlying these manifestations.

This is all the more true in that experience acquired elsewhere [2] is often, instead of a help, a reef which is as perilous as it is appealing. So it is that one is naturally tempted to apply to native institutions the nomenclature and the fundamental characteristics of institutions - especially European ones - which are assumed to be comparable. When origins and development are thus transferred to a foreign context, native custom is deformed. It can

584 is unfavorable, that is by no means the end of the matter, for both ancestors and gods usually allow themselves to be persuaded, for a price. When the reply is, or becomes, favorable, the furu-bolo-ma-tigi gives customary presents to the fa and to the girl's family. Henceforth, the two communities, that of the young man and that of the girl, are united by a bond that can be broken only for the gravest reasons, and even then a rupture will usually give rise to serious disagreements.

[583] It is at this point that the parties agree, not without much argument and bargaining, on the amount, type, and mode of payment of the bride price and the date on which the girl will be handed over.

Between the time of the agreement and the release of the woman, there is a period which is often very long and in some cases several years. This interval is used by the girl's mother to prepare the things she will give her daughter (clothing, household utensils, etc.). [198] The fiancé, meanwhile, needs the time to accumulate what he has promised to pay when the girl is given to him.

584 602 From this moment on, the relations between the two communities are very strictly governed. Native etiquette forbids the fiancée henceforth to meet or to take meals with her future brother-in-law unless a third party is present. The same applies to the young man and his future mother-in-law. The fiancé must constantly show that he takes an interest in anything that concerns his future affinal family. He must attend funerals and festivals or at least send a material contribution consistent with his wealth and social standing. When field work is in progress, it is customary for the fiancé's fula-ni to appear in a body and ceremoniously share the work. This demonstration of solidarity is mostly more noisy than helpful; the work is wholly simulated, but the proceedings always end in dancing and copious drinking.

583 184 Bride price (1) and gifts. The woman is not turned over

1. In certain regions (Bougouni, Sikasso, Koutiala, San) there is no regularly constituted bride price; the bridegroom's

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[184] family gives the bride's family a young girl to replace the one taken away.

until all or a portion of the agreed bride price has been paid and especially not before the customary gifts have been received.

The nature and value of the bride price and gifts vary since they depend on the wealth of the future husband, the rank of the woman and family customs. Among the poor, the bride price is small: a few handfuls of cowries, a chicken, a few
[435] kola nuts, a few lengths of native cotton. An average bride price is worth, in all, 25,000 to 30,000 cowries (about 25 to 30 francs). Among the rich, the bride price may include one or more slaves, gold jewelry, silver, fabrics, clothing, etc.

The same is true of the gifts; everything depends on the families involved. It is customary around Ségou, however, for the fiancé to give his bride a large piece of native material called kundugu fini, a dloké (a kind of blouse), and a pair of sandals with very thick soles. He must also, if he can afford to, give her a slave to do the kitchen work, a cow, jewelry, etc. [199]

He must also give presents to the girl's parents in accordance with his means.

The totality of the bride price and gifts is called furu-fen', literally, "the property of the marriage." As soon as part of this furu-fen' is handed over to the furu-bolo-ma-tigi, he takes it,
[273] escorted by some of the fiancé's friends, to the girl's fa. All of these proceedings, of course, involve jugs of native beer (dlo). The notables of the place, the dugu-tigi, the "elders," and even the kamalen', come at once to congratulate the family, to share in the drinking, and to receive a share of the furu-fen'.

The fiancée is often a little girl, and in that case the duties of the young man and his family go on for several years. The giving of gifts is repeated, to an extent commensurate with the young man's wealth and the standing of the girl's family.
431 At the time of harvest it is customary for the fiancé to send one
583 or more baskets of millet, each weighing 20 to 40 kilos, and from time to time, a jug of beer, 20 to 30 liters. On the

553 851 [562] Women are not admitted to the men's circle. Gathered near the mother's hut, they know that a name has been given, but do not know what it is. The woman who tied the cord then washes the baby three times in warm, soapy water and, taking water into her mouth, sprinkles the tiny body from neck to lower back three times. She then expresses her good wishes. Carrying the child, she goes to the door of the hut, where the father and family heads are waiting, and asks the name. Then she returns to the women and places the child on the lap of an old woman who blows into the baby's ears three times and then shouts in each ear: "Kuyo! Kuyo! i tua dara, "that is, "Kuyo! Kuyo! [854] your name is ...." The child is then wrapped in the narrow swaddling band which the mother will henceforth use to carry him on her back, and if it is a boy, the baby is rolled three times over the blade of an ax, or if a girl, over an iron implement for picking cotton. While this is going on, everyone is expressing best wishes.

● [184] In Kaarta the ceremony is somewhat different. A beef or a sheep killed in front of the mother's hut, and dege [Ed., coarsely ground millet in water] is also prepared. The baby's head is shaved, and the hair is placed on the dege. Each guest [564] puts his right hand on the edge of the gourd and a griot expresses good wishes for the newborn child. Then the guests dance around the dish of dege; the hair is removed from it and given to the mother to keep. [213] Then if the occasion warrants it, the [304] three lines of tattooing peculiar to the Kouloubali are made on the baby's face with a dagger. Finally the griot takes the child, carries it around the crowd, and returns it to the father, who must then make known the chosen name. When the father has pronounced the name, the griot again takes the child and, making a trumpet of his hands, cries out to him three times: "your name is...."

551 In principle, the name (tua) recalls some circumstance surrounding the birth. A posthumous child is usually given his father's name, as though he were the reincarnation of the father, or more commonly, he is called Fa-n-ko, "posthumous" (literally, "the one who came after the fa"). If the baby shows some resemblance to a deceased person, he is named for the person or,

614 Lengthy and noisy festivities, where dlo (millet beer) flows freely, food is abundant, and songs and dances are performed, [329] mark the general rejoicing. They last for seven days, but forty days must elapse before the new fama is deemed definitively installed.

In theory, the new fama must turn over the management of his own community to his heir presumptive. In fact, however, this retirement is usually fictitious. The fama intermingles his [421] own property and the property he administers for the clan to such an extent that, in the last analysis, the Massa-si and everything dependent on them -- persons and things -- are an inherent and inseparable part of the clan. Under the cover of this confusion, the general and determined tendency of all the fama was to work unceasingly at confiscation from the clan for the benefit of the community of the Massa-si. At least they have managed to make their office absolutely hereditary, with no possibility of competition, and as a result the election is merely the public recognition as fama of whatever individual is considered by the Massa-si to be fa of their community.

This accounts for the superior role of the Massa-si. They are the provincial governors, heads of army corps, etc., thus confirming the seizure of all sorts of clan property by the Massa-si community.

The corps of sofa is particularly powerful, and through it the fama is easily able to counterbalance any attempted insubordination which sometimes shows itself among the heads of the ton'-dyon'. The leader of the slaves is, in any case, the personal tool of the fama.

•184 These measures emphasize the close connection between
614 the fama and the ton'-dyon'. On examination, this appears to be much closer than at Ségou, because from the very beginning in Kaarta the fama assured himself of unquestioned pre-eminence over the ton'-dyon', and later he was able to remain free of the influence of the ton' and even to impose his authority by relying on the loyalty of the sofa.

There was another peculiarity in the fact that the principal allies of the Massa-si, the Konaré, called Kala-n-ka-u (people

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614 from Kala), are priests of the protective idol of the clan. This clan brotherhood is likewise very strong and gives valuable support to the fama by guaranteeing everyone's loyalty to him. Each army corps, each segment of the clan of whatever sort, is organized as a branch of this brotherhood, so that not only everything [330] that belongs to the clan but actually everything that touches it in any way is subject to the same religious guardianship.

In Kaarta, as in Ségou, the ton'-dyon' are divided into chiefdoms of varying importance. With the fama, the principal chiefs of the ton'-dyon' form a kind of permanent council of the clan. On the other hand, the familiars of the fama, chosen at his pleasure, constitute a privy council whose influence is often in conflict with the decisions and desires of the council of the dyon'-kuntigi.

As at Ségou, the supreme leader of the slaves has a very important position, but aside from the fact that he is a tool of the fama, the homogeneity of the ton' prevents him from developing into as dangerous an antagonist as the ton'-masa at Ségou.

The general assemblies are also somewhat different from those at Ségou. They are made up of other elements; in addition to the fama and his people, the dyon'-kuntigi, and the ton'-dyon, there are the allies, whose role is not insignificant, and also some important tributaries, Diawara and Kagoro, who make their importance felt and thus influence the fama. Hence, especially when grave situations arise, these assemblies have a certain amount of independence which imposes decisions on the fama.

The revenue of the clan, generally speaking, does not differ from that at Ségou.

In conclusion and by way of comparison with the people of Ségou, the clan of the Massa-si appears to be more homogeneous because in the beginning it was not restricted by the framework of a pre-existent native institution. It was formed and developed freely through the initiative of the Massa-si family, which always jealously safeguarded its management.

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•184 On the other hand, it closely resembles the clan of the
614 Khasso region, on which we have published a detailed study (1).
[331]

1. See Les Khassonké in the series Revue du Monde musulman.

Chapter 6

Islam

1. Islamism and Paganism

771 It is a commonplace to say that the Bambara are im-
797 placable enemies of Islam.

However, history shows that for centuries the Bambara have been living in contact with Islam, that they maintain close relations with native communities of Islamic converts, and that they are willing to seek the good offices of marabouts of all races and ranks.

Are they, besides, as refractory to conversion as they are said to be? The chiefs of the clans of Ségou and Kaarta and some of their near connections and intimates, as well as other notables, have been practicing Islam. The Somono, who are of Bambara extraction, are faithful believers and, what is even more significant, they are fervent propagandists for Islam.

Actually, paganism and Islamism are not mutually antagonistic dogmas in the minds of the Bambara or of the Sudanese people in general, as many Europeans believe and state it to be. In these regions, Islamization has a counterpart which prepares the way for it and explains it, and that is the "sudanization" of Islam.

During his sojourn in Kaarta Raffenel tells of an interesting incident: "I had as a landlord a blacksmith named Niany, a grotesque personage, excessively naive and with a corresponding sense of logic, but a good fellow and very amusing. One day he

192 with nature; the same terms designate the parts of animals, plants, or even objects. These words serve as roots, as do the names of the four elements and of their properties. Two consequences follow:

1. A great ease in forming compound words; 2. The existence [194] of a multiplicity of homonyms which we can distinguish only by the context, but which the natives distinguish by differences in tone or in vowel length.

E. Numeration

802 In contrast to the Ouolof and Peul, who first count to five and then say "five and one," "five and two," etc., the Bambara have a different name for each number from one to ten (the word "five," doulou, [16] comes from "hand"; the word "ten", tan, from "to thank," to give both hands). After ten, they count "ten and one," "ten and two," up to 20, which is said as two tens, then three tens, four tens, etc., up to 80. The series begins again after 80 as it does in French after 100.

The Bambara have graphic signs to represent numbers. These 212 signs have been studied by S. de Ganay (1).

1. S. de Ganay, "Graphie Bambara des nombres" [Bambara Number Writing]. [Ed., Journal de la Société de Africanistes, No. 2, 1950.]

[184] The graphic system varies with regions and sometimes from one village to another, but the most widespread method uses a series of vertical lines, each line representing a unit. To indicate that the number is doubled, the lines are placed inside a circle or crossed by a horizontal bar: |||| or ⓘ or ‡ = four. To indicate an uneven number, a line is added under the horizontal bar.

But a line may indicate not only a unit, but a group of ten, and even a "hundred," keme (whose value is 80). To keep this clear, an arc is put over the line: ⌒ = 80.

212 Some systems represent ten by ten lines or by five barred 801 lines under a single line. This method has a religious origin; it recalls that "creation is the issue of a unique principle symbolized

231 [35] However, the Bambara can assemble flocks by exchanging their grain for animals obtained from Peul, Moor, or Touareg shepherds. It is their way of investing their savings; thus, they never dispose of their animals during their periods of increase, but let them grow old in the herds, and their capital increases effortlessly, watched over by the head of the family.

233 In the Sahel, during the rainy season, the animals live by grazing on the numerous grasses and leguminous plants that grow on the mimosa-studded steppe. During the dry season, they live on the fallen branches and husks of the acacias. Then there is transhumance to the inundated regions which become pastures as the waters recede. In the Nioro region, transhumance is towards the Kaarta, the Baoulé, and the Bakoy.

In the Sudan region the animals entrusted to the Peul make short journeys to change pastures; in the rainy season, to the plateaus which are immense pastures; from November on, they return to the valleys and streams.

In the Guinean area, the village flock is entrusted to a Peul shepherd who leads it off in the morning and brings it back at night. The animals are then tethered to the stakes in their owners' courtyards or are penned in an enclosure where the women go to milk them. After the harvest the flocks graze in the fields, but, from the beginning of February, they no longer stray from the dwellings, because everything is parched. The beasts are then fed millet, peanut stalks, or foliage.

231 Neither cattle nor sheep are in the least supervised in reproduction. Coupling is unrestricted and takes place at random in the pastures and at the whim of the animals throughout the year. Birth occurs no matter where; the herdsmen know nothing of obstetrical practice. The calves are nourished with a lightly salted mash of millet stalks or with the crushed fruit of a fig named aourou which supposedly has milk-producing properties.

232 The finest male goats often are castrated to fatten or tame them. In Kaarta and Mandé goats are raised in pens constructed on piles one or two meters from the ground, with a flooring of boughs which allows excrement to fall through. In this way, the animals are protected from the humidity and from wild beasts.

692 In matters of justice, the Bambara frequently continue to consult their old tribal judges. It must be noted, however, that in taking away the judicial competence of the old chiefs, the French administration has contributed to diminishing, and almost to completely destroying, their power.

[717 622]

The Bambara had a judicial organization quite as precise and regulated as their religious organization, although there was no codified law, such as the Koran or the Hebrew tables of law. Justice was rendered according to rules which each community passed on from generation to generation. These rules are not of divine origin, but they [69] are sacred nevertheless, for custom is the legacy of the ancestors. The Fama and his council of notables could promulgate new laws, but, before deciding on a new rule, they consult the Komo and the Nyama [an altar]. Then, in the presence of a priest, each one swears on the altar to obey the law which becomes sacred. Moreover, the customary rules cannot be separated from the moral code and the religion to which they are linked. They are not uniform; each canton has its own, and often each village, and within each of these there are observances peculiar to certain families or to certain castes. Nevertheless, the sentiment of fair play is very strong among the Blacks, but they do not admit the equality of men, who are naturally different one from another according to their aptitudes, means, and condition.

671 [643 645] [184] [181]

Custom regulates all relations between individuals and between individuals and the collectivity.

692 Two sorts of native tribunals existed in the Bambara country: a tribunal of conciliation, presided over by the village chief, who assembled a council of notables; and a high tribunal presided over by the Fama, to whom were submitted the matters which the first tribunal had been unable to settle. In addition, the Fama could call before his tribunal the civil or penal matters which seemed to him to be of importance to the public order.

695 643 Justice was without charge and rendered day and night by the Fama as one of his essential functions, for the judge is the one who repairs the disorders that shake society. The hearings were solemnly conducted and took place under the silk-cotton tree (Ceiba pentandra)